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EMERSON THE NIHILIST.

CHARLES GRAY SHAW.

EMERSON tells us that he was wont to dip his pen into the blackest ink without fear of falling into the ink-pot. After nearly a century of Emerson, we are ready to read his message, whose dark character is best expressed after the manner of idealistic nihilism. Endowed with a pure soul, which saved him from personal contumely, and equipped with a superb style, which usually tempered and veiled his severe philosophy, Emerson did not hesitate to elaborate ideals which, at a later period, were to characterize such disturbed and maligned souls as Baudelaire and Wagner, Stirner and Ibsen. In spite of the purity of his soul and the serenity of his art, Emerson did not shrink from the anarchistic, the immoralistic, the irreligious; such were the different hues which darted from the star of individualism as it shone upon his head. To-day, when warm social winds are fanning all minds, this cold current of the anti-social cannot fail to be wholesome and stimulating; into the close atmosphere of such social thinking, Emerson's *Essays* rush in like a draft; to enjoy the refreshing influence, we must run the risk of taking cold. We Americans have our Emerson; why, then, should we dote on Nietzsche? Nietzsche's hardness, his coldness, his acidiferous ethics were anticipated by Emerson, whose *Essays* of 1841 may be considered the beginning of downright egoism in the world.

"Blessed be nothing!" This text of Transcendentalism was the fundamental tone of Emerson's music, the music of the future; "the worse things are, the better they are;" or, as Nietzsche expressed it, "Things must grow better, that is, worse." Emerson pretended to settle nothing; an endless seeker, an experimenter with no past at his back, he would unsettle everything. True and false, good and bad, sacred and profane were to him but so many

artificial distinctions of no authority to the healthy, happy ego; the only fact whose authenticity could not be questioned was the fact of selfhood; 'I am' is categorical; all else, truth, goodness, holiness, and the like, is purely hypothetical.

When and where did it begin, this nihilistic habit of insisting upon the 'I am' and the 'I think?' With Eve in Eden, with Prometheus? The world has always had some place for the ego, but the ego as something self-conscious and self-willed was the product of the nineteenth century; before that time, the 'self' merely occurred; after Robespierre, Kant, and Goethe, the self came into being as "the one who wills himself." Yet, criticism must not overlook that hardness of the seventeenth century which, usually devoted to the rigid affirmation of orthodoxy, made room for the humanism and Satanism of Milton. When Milton's Satan learned that "to be weak is to be miserable," when he taught himself to say, "evil, be thou my good," the ethics of the strong had begun; and with it "the transvaluation of all values." So the eighteenth century, with its yes-and-no skepticism, did not fail to repudiate its own rationalizing moralism when Blake wrote his *Prophetic Books*; with Blake's *Jerusalem* before us, we have no especial need of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*; indeed, Blake's *Voice of the Devil* and *Proverbs of Hell* make all Nietzschean utterances seem quite proper. Blake, Emerson, and Nietzsche agreed that the good is the strong, the bad the weak; in such ethical dynamism lies their only justification; we of the age of social weakness need this tonic, this iron in our anæmic veins. Our Poe has opened the strong sources of irrationalism; our Emerson has made immoralism possible, credible. As we revolve about these foci of our American culture, we must prepare to enlarge the ellipse, to enrich the content of our spiritual life; we must prepare for a higher synthesis than current scientism and sociality now afford us.

Emerson was not unaware of the strong humanism which Milton had instilled into the character of his Adam;

the stronger Satanism of *Paradise Lost's* hero, however, seems to have escaped his notice; in like manner, Emerson knew of Blake, but it was Blake's mysticism, not his unique moralism, which made its appeal to him. Now, Emerson had Aryan "blue-eyedness," as Nietzsche calls it; indeed, where do we find bluer eyes, where a deeper, brighter blue-eyedness? The intimate history of nineteenth-century individualism is Emersonian in its whole alphabet, from alpha to omega. The "so-called nineteenth century," to employ the *more hibernico*, was not wholly surrendered to industrialism; no, for it was with individualism as well as industrialism that that epoch had busied itself; in America, it is Emerson, not Edison, who should be our guiding-star. We shrink from Emerson because he was superior; then, there is in his case the well-grounded suspicion that Emerson is a bit dangerous. The Emersonian danger is found in the fact that, when he wrote with black ink, his pen of iron indited a message of frank nihilism, and we hate to think America guilty of such an outrage; let Russians repudiate law; let Germans speculate upon socialism; but let it not be thought that America can be capable of revolt.

To trace the descent of nihilistic individualism in the last century is to return to German Romanticism, with its ideal of æsthetic personality; to French realism with Beyle and *beylisme*; to Slavonic nihilism rendered real by Gogol and Dostoievsky. Not forgetting Beyle, it may be said that Turgénieff's Bazárov, in *Fathers and Children*, was the first living egoist; Bazárov, the "bird of prey," soared higher than any one of Beyle's characters; psychologically, Bazárov is less interesting, less real than Dostoievsky's Raskolnikow, in *Crime and Punishment*; his only advantage lies in the fact that he made his appearance six years earlier. Emerson came before the Slavonic and Gallic genius had pictured nihilism; the essay on *Self Reliance* antedates Stirner's *Ego* by the safe margin of three years. When Wagner and Ibsen were struggling with the problem of conformity and freedom, the emanci-

pation of the ego was an old story to our Emerson. Shall we not style Emerson the first of modern egoists? Then, since these post-Emersonian revolutionists have made selfhood popular, shall we not have the courage to analyze Emersonian egoism, explaining where we cannot justify, considering where, perhaps, we cannot accept? If the ink was not too black for his page, it should not be too black for our eyes.

Anarchism.

In the world-old conflict between internal spontaneity and external organization, there can be no doubt where Emerson will take his stand. His Transcendentalism will transcend, it will transcend the social order. To Emerson, society was a conspiracy against the self which was forced to surrender the claims of culture to the need for bread. The result of the economico-social arrangement of mankind was to expatriate the human ego, who henceforth became but a "bastard and interloper in the world which existed for him." The ego lisps when it strives to say 'self;' the shibboleth sounds like 'society.' Having dwelt so long in the social order, the individual has forgotten that the supreme element of spiritual life, so frankly expressed by the ancient Jehovah, could be none other than an "I am that I am." Hence the time has come for man to take up his life in the truth, where he will no longer recognize friend or neighbor, father or mother; to these he says, "Unhand me!" Emerson assumes this anti-social attitude because he feels that society is incapable of that development which by divine right belongs to the individual. Emerson's distrust of the social, whose evolutionary capabilities are now advertised in every new work on Sociology, was due to his feeling that the evolution of society, like society itself, is nothing but illusion; where society forges ahead here, it falls back there; if it gains on the side of art, it loses so much instinct; where it is wiser it is weaker.

The anti-social character of Emerson's egoism is usually supposed to exercise and exhaust itself so thoroughly with

the shallow question of conformity and consistency that his *Essays* may safely be read by the college sophomore, if not by the high-school 'senior.' In Emerson's non-conformity no one thinks to see the anticipation of Marx's strictures on the institution of private property, or of Ibsen's criticism of domestic relations. It is undeniable that Emerson was inimical to that social consciousness which uses the stage-whisper to indicate conformity, but the Emersonian polemic plunged deeper into the heart of the matter. Conformity was but a game of "blind-man's buff," in place of which pastime, Emerson would substitute the spontaneous activity of the self in which the anti-social and the anti-natural are set at naught. Is he not ready "to preach the doctrine of hatred when the doctrine of love pules and whines?" Let genius call, and he will shun father and mother, wife and brother; can he be a dutiful son or a chaste husband when he is not first himself? Where spiritual affinity binds him to those of his own kind, he will be all love and self-sacrifice; but where charity is miscellaneous, he will be so hard that every dollar wrenched from him can be but a "wicked dollar," and then there will come a bright, brisk Emersonian day when he will have the strength to resist all that is philanthropic. All this, as found in the essay on *Self Reliance*, bespeaks the hardness and blue-eyedness of the Emersonian ego; so sclerotic was his sense of selfhood that Nietzsche had no need to cry, "Be hard!"

In his conception of the political, Emerson was as rigorous with wealth as he has been seen to be with poverty. "Are the poor my poor?" he asks. Emerson saw nothing attractive or authentic in the old-time organization of souls whence have descended the institutions of property and law; the self is all, the State nothing. In the transcendental consciousness, with its beyond-seeing, society becomes an illusion about which we humans are somewhat superstitious. To make use of his *ipsissima verba*, "Every actual State is corrupt. Good men must not obey the laws too well." Man must thus be 'transcendental'; he must be

'Beyond Man.' When Emerson informs us that he cannot recall a single instance of an individual who, "on the simple ground of his own moral nature, has steadily denied the authority of the laws," we wonder whether he is not indicating his own position according to which the moral should supplant the political, the individualistic the social. Saints have always been suspicious of the State, and it has been the Kingdom triumphant within rather than the Kingdom militant without that has enlisted them under its oriflamme. St. Augustine's *City of God* argued that the State was originally instituted on behalf of sinners, for the saints had no need of law; now the city of Cain is a poor parody on the City of God. If all were Emersons, if all men could realize the beyond, the transcendental within them, there were no need for those interesting institutions which express themselves in the forms of law and property.

The transcendental Yankee with all his shrewdness, with his ability to capitalize on the basis of the Lyceum those ideas which were quite anti-capitalistic, does not balk at the institution of property. "The world is governed too much," he thinks; let the State keep its hands off this "Kingdom of the me." At best, man can own no more than his own personality, but in taking possession of the private self, the ego secures possession of the whole earth. "All your aggregate existences," says his young radical, "are less to me a fact than is my own; as I am born to the earth, so the earth is given to me." The State misses the point when it turns its attention away from education to the economic; as a result, the State makes property degrading while it makes it possible for "the rich to encroach upon the poor, and to keep them poor." At this point, Emerson approaches the principles of Marxian socialism, but his essential aim is to enhance culture rather than to negate commerce. Like Wilde, in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, Emerson seems willing to drop the question of property if he be allowed to lay emphasis upon culture. "To educate the wise man the State exists, and with the appearance of the wise man the State expires. The

appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State." Now, this is perhaps the best of Emerson's theoretical anarchy, even when it is not the most radical of its characteristics.

Like Marx, Emerson was unwilling to attribute to any man or group of men the act of choice whence the institution of Law and Capital was foisted upon the sons of men; it was "Necessity" which brought about the "vile compromise;" no deliberate act of mankind is to be made responsible for the "vituperated Sodom." Arising from Necessity, this predicament of the State is to be attributed to the weakness of man's will and the dullness of his intellect; but, where blame may not duly rest upon man as such, the case of the Conservative is not so clear. The Conservative makes of the State a sort of "strait-jacket;" he seeks to conserve a kind of "Chinese stagnation," which the radical would redeem by reverting to a "state of war or anarchy" whence the individual may be put upon his own mettle. It is not to be assumed that Emerson takes his transcendental stand by the side of the Reformer; indeed, he is a bit suspicious of the Reformer; nevertheless, Emerson enjoyed all disorganizing tendencies in civilization, while his preference for the Reformer rests upon the idea that the Reformer bases his principles upon ethics. The planet is peopled with conservatives, thinks Emerson, and this may be because, as Anatole France suggested, "ours is the planet of hunger, the place where one eats," just as Cabanis had had the insolence to define man as a "digestive tube." Emerson's hope in the midst of the social "predicament" reposed in the idea that "one Reformer may yet be born." One? we ask; must he be a Transcendentalist?

Owen and Fourier were known to Emerson; the personality of the one and the philosophy of the other made their appeal to his open nature. In the Massachusetts of the forties, little oases of socialism had sprung up; Emerson was at least interested. Emerson could wish that the world might be 'Fourierized, humanized,' and yet there was ever the transcendental scruple against system with

its lack of a Beyond. Fourier, he thought, had skipped one fact, and that an important one,—the fact of “Life:” now, Life scorns systems and system-makers; Life is elusive, progressive, surprising. Life must be the beginning and the end of all social arrangement, and it is a question whether Life is socialistic. With this general scruple against socialism, Emerson’s strict nature could not endure the consequence which, from the time of Plato, seemed to follow upon the abolition of private property; that was the institution of marriage. As if the French had not always been fine feminists in their psychology, he accuses Fourier of failing to understand the nature of woman; to be more definite, the Transcendentalist was rather shocked at the sex-consequences of the new scheme of civilization, while he feared the practical outcome of the plan, when submitted to the “lawless crew” that usually sails under the colors of humanity.

Emerson’s best and fondest anarchism was thus of the theoretical nature; it finds its expression in the essays on *Circles* and *Nominalist and Realist*. The substance of the discourse on *Circles* is to the effect that there are none; the eye and the mind may draw them now and then, but the world as such scorns all limitations. “The only sin is limitation;” that is, the habit of drawing circles about the will is the great Bad. We as humans within this or that circle must be prepared for Surprise, *die Überraschung* which Nietzsche so strangely condemned for Nietzsche himself built his system upon *Überraschung*. Emerson is prepared for surprise, since he feels capable of abandon, the Dionysian of Nietzsche. In his treatment of that human trait whereby the intellect draws its finished circle around a certain arrangement of facts to make of these a system or an institution, Emerson was Nietzschean in his avowed Nominalism. Where Realism, Platonic or Scholastic as it may be, comes to its conclusion and thus establishes a Republic or a Church, Nominalism insists upon the individual fact, whether thing or person. Plato had trouble when he sought to subsume all things under the

Idea; Anselm's Realism could not prevent the rise of Nominalism, or the principle of individuation, or the supremacy of the will; Hegel's Absolutism aroused the revolutionary egoism of Stirner. Emerson resisted the synthetic tendency, which ever tends to make man pliable and stuff-like.

In the elaboration of an anarchistic Nominalism, Emerson coined certain delightful expressions, such as the "imperfection of individuals" and "to embroil the confusion." In dilating upon self-reliance, Emerson has no better imperative than, "Insist upon yourself;" now he is in a position to put an edge to his maxim, for he can say, 'Insist upon your individual imperfection;' 'embroil the confusion.' If man is socially perfect, the State can treat him as a unit, modern sociology can define him as a 'social cell.' Fancy Emerson as a 'social cell!' Imagine the Transcendentalist taking his place in the social ranks! Alas! for 'social ethics' if America had its Emerson to-day! Nietzsche does not nullify the smug social program because Nietzsche was insane; but here was a sane Superman who said, "A strong person makes the law and custom null before his own will." Do we not have to settle with such strength, or must we indeed submit to the social bundling and baling of souls as this takes place in every quarter where 'efficiency' has entered the brain? All who are good are efficient; Emerson was not efficient: Emerson was not good. So runneth the social syllogism. Alas! Camestres! Alas! Emerson!

Indifferency, then, and not efficiency was the summit of Emersonianism. We must insist upon that degree of imperfection which shall save us from classification. "Democracy runs to anarchy, but in the State and in the schools it is indispensable to resist the consolidation of all into a few men." In the midst of this play and counter-play of constructive and destructive forces, the Transcendentalist waits in faith and hope believing that the Best will come. But, meanwhile, what? The Emersonian "Meanwhile," that transitional period of reform with the

average man, was characterized in manner likely to shock the serious social thinker. 'Meanwhile' Transcendentalists beguile themselves with "jokes" and "crimes," with "eating and sleeping." Of course, Emerson had more serious moments than the foregoing would seem to indicate; he preached both activism and indifferentism. "The whole frame of things preaches indifferency. Do not craze yourself about thinking, but go about your business anywhere." Is this the dilettantism so well known to the French from Montaigne to Voltaire, from Ernest Renan to Anatole France? Like Voltaire, Emerson turned to the garden when his eyes lost sight of truth in the skies. If life is a "bubble, a skepticism, a sleep within a sleep," then "dig away in your garden." This we may believe, came into Emerson's mind directly in accordance with his appreciation of Nature and her ameliorating influences, not because he had been reading *Candide*. Let the Sphinx answer her own questions; for ourselves, "we will do as we do."

Immoralism.

Emerson was a slick cat that could climb up to the shelves of the apothecary, and move about without disturbing a bottle; in the midst of these moral meanderings, he purred with strange contentment. Individualistic Nominalism with its transcendental possibilities has had no trouble with the idea of the State; how does it fare when the synthesis is one of principles rather than one of mere external laws? Emerson displayed an unwillingness to abide by the superior limitations usually indicated by the terms 'good' and 'bad;' his ethics will be antinomian; that is, "hypernomian." In this Emersonism, we have the original form of the Nietzschean "Beyond Good and Evil." Transcendental where the question was one of the social State, Emerson was hypernomian in his treatment of social morality. In the Emersonian Beyond, that summit which provided no more space than that which the individual would occupy, 'good' and 'bad' are like the foot-hills with

their little valleys; Emerson was thus Ibsenesque in his fondness for the 'heights.' In order to prepare ourselves and our consciences for the hypernomian transcendence of conventional morality, let us recall the fact that, like Blake and Nietzsche, if not like Stendhal and Wagner, Emerson was consecrated to the idea of the Strong. He had no Siegfried or Zarathustra to bear his message, so he bore it himself; his was the 'conscience of the Viking;' he himself was the 'blond beast,' the *bête blanc* with its blue-eyedness.

Dipping his pen into the blackest ink, Emerson used no blotting-paper; or was sand the absorbing medium of a writer in the forties? The sources of Emerson's joyous immoralism are not easily identified, since the Transcendentalist was not in the habit of proceeding from historical premises to his personal conclusions in the present. Behind his hypernomian assertions lay the good and great realm of nature, upon the authority of which Rousseau had seen fit to negate the institutions of culture and civilization, just as Schiller had in the same manner found it possible to exalt the character of the 'naïve' poet. And Emerson likewise; did he not feel that he was child of the Naïve? Then, like Schiller, Emerson was at home in a Paganism which knew no distinctions of inner and outer, joy and sorrow, good and bad; Emerson knew that the 'first empire,' that of the flesh, had given way to the 'second empire' of the spirit, but he confesses that he was glad to observe that "the Pagan world had stood its ground and died hard." To naturism and Paganism, Emerson added the pre-Christian qualities of the old Germanic and Scandinavian world-orders, where lawlessness and wild strength gave a strange sanction to life as such. Like Wagner and Ibsen, Emerson drew strength from the Sagas; hence we hear him saying, "Let us enter into the state of war and wake Thor and Woden, courage and constancy, in our Saxon breasts." Then, in the midst of these more remote sources of inspiration, Emerson felt the influence of the American Indian with his predilection for war and wandering.

Wild strength was the category upon which the hypernomian life-ideal was to be built. Take such a text as the following, and see whether Wagner, Ibsen, or Nietzsche has been capable of a greater degree of hardness: "Wild liberty develops iron conscience!" Like Nietzsche, Emerson was in the habit of concluding that Christianity had been responsible for that weakness which had caused the moral life to lose the vigor peculiar to "wild virtue," according to which the healthy moral will had found it possible to resist all compassion and compunction. If conscience, the Darwinian conscience of 'sociability,' tends to make us weak, the will must make us strong. "Nature, as we know her, is no saint. She comes eating and drinking and sinning. Her darlings, the great, the strong, the beautiful, are not children of our law; do not come out of the Sunday School, nor punctually keep the commandments." What, then, shall the Hypernomian do? The Hypernomian must follow nature; "if we will be strong with her strength we must not harbor such disconsolate consciences, borrowed too from the consciences of other nations." If there must be goodness, let it "have some edge to it;" our existence is an existence indeed, not an 'expiation.'

Strength sanctions hypernomian morality; at the same time, it is strength which affords the ground of judgment, whence all ethical distinctions are made. The Transcendentalist must will under the form of the Strong, must judge in the light of the same dynamic. Virtue, so Emerson tells us, arises in the moment of Spontaneity; from the spontaneous soul all moral distinctions proceed. "No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferrable to this or that; the only right is that which is after my own constitution; the only wrong what is against it." In the same manner, Emerson sought to base moral distinctions upon the clear intellect; where the will is strong and the intellect clear, there can be naught but the good. Why the sadness of the saints? The saints do not see that, since it is in-

tellekt rather than conscience which makes the genuine moral distinction, "the only sin is limitation." Where there is volitional weakness and mental diminution, there is sin; where man is strong and boundless, man is moral.

Since Darwin, all 'scientific' moralists have been in the habit of transferring conscience from its esoteric seat in an inexplicable 'intuition' to the exoteric position of the social order. Since the days of Darwin, morality has been deluged with social ideals so that at the present moment no one can be 'moral' unless he is intoxicated with the idea of social service. Emerson lived between dates which knew little or nothing of these socializing extravagances; he was able to rejoice in the ideal of self-culture before humanity capitulated to the notion of social service. Were he with us to-day, would he not challenge this smug ideal? Would he not ask, What do you mean by your 'social?' Is your 'social' a concept broad enough to include superior souls, or is it forever limited to the populace, the immigrant population? And service, likewise; how can one human being serve another? Hands and feet he may be, but not brain; the individual must do his own thinking. Hence, do not talk of 'society' until you have invested that term with due and sufficient content, nor prate about 'service' until you know somewhat about the essential needs of humanity. Emerson's own attitude was that of the superior man, the Greek god. He fears that we may "be ruined by our good nature." Like the Apollo whom he so ardently admired, Emerson felt that he was "born into other politics" than those which are peculiar to the "turmoils of earth;" his true attitude is one of repose in the "eternal and beautiful." In this manner, the Transcendentalist inoculates us against the social distempers which tend everywhere to infect us; when once we have read his black message, we cannot surrender to the pale ideals of contemporary ethics.

As to optimism, that subterfuge of the shallow-minded, dare we attribute such softness to our Emerson? Emerson was cheerful, but his smile was born of the sense of strength;

he was hopeful, because he felt that he held the secret of the universe in his own brain. Perhaps we can come to an understanding with the Transcendentalist if we forego the desire to dilate upon the respective merits of the optimistico-pessimistic controversy; if we admit that, with all its penetration, with all its insistence upon the Ideal, with all its refusal to accept a rapid, temporary solution of the life-problem, pessimism is often open to the charge of weakness, of Schopenhauerian No-saying. Of this pessimistic passivism Schopenhauer was guilty, and so was Wagner; not so Emerson, or Nietzsche; theirs was the 'pessimism of strength.' If the optimists can gather comfort from Emerson's perpetual Yes-saying, they are welcome to it; the pessimists may rest content in the consciousness that Emerson, even as he said, "awoke expecting nothing from the universe;" the universe had given him a will, and that sufficed him. In one of his earlier essays, that on *The Tragic*, Emerson made due overture to sorrow when he declared that, "as the salt sea covers more than two-thirds of the surface of the globe, so sorrow encroaches in man on felicity." If Emerson had any tinge of optimism, it was not the optimism of assumption; Transcendentalism was far from felicitarianism, for pleasure was to him but a means of swelling vein and muscle with strength.

Irreligion.

Emerson at the very latest dates is thus full of surprises to all mediocre minds and to individualists as well. With a gentle but persistent anarchism, with a firm but healthy immoralism, he could do no more than complete his program, and thus take his place among the irreligionists. Let us out with it at once, and have it over; then, we may be able to find some justifying solution for his intellectual and volitional diabolism. Emerson escaped, aye, he delivered himself, from the morbid Satanism of the Poe-awakened Baudelaire, for even in his blackest utterances he was joyous and confident. He lived wholly from within, not like Baudelaire and Huysmans, whose Within was

an underground chamber of the dark and damp, but with an Inwardness lofty and airy. When a friend suggested that his strictures upon certain doctrines of the Church, instead of coming from above, as Emerson had avowed, might perhaps come from below, he refused to be smoked out of himself, and replied, "If I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." This resolution, we may imagine, was due to his desire to 'live his own life,' to 'will himself,' as we say to-day. Upon another occasion, and one quite uncalled for, Emerson expressed a certain satisfaction in the consciousness of Satanism of which apparently he had no desire to rid himself. Upon a fine New England morning, he awakens to find the "dear old spiritual world, and even the dear old Devil not far off." Again it was the consciousness of strength, at once of Milton and Blake, that must have prompted this sweet utterance.

Emerson's joyous diabolism was at times more calculated and convincing; where strength was his major premise, sin was his major conclusion. "It is an esoteric doctrine of society that a little wickedness is good to make muscle;" thus equipped, the strong conscience has the strength to "run like the wild goat and the wolf." In the case of the strong individual, the debt to vice must not be disowned; "in short, there is no man who is not at some time indebted to his vices, as no plant that is not fed from manures. Man, however, must grow up and develop out of such soil. As Sudermann's Magda expressed it, "We must sin if we wish to grow; sin and then grow greater than our sin." Was not Emerson willing to be classed with the goats rather than the sheep?

In the elaboration of the irreligious ideal of strength and progress, Emerson did not fail to avail himself of those principles of Nominalism which, since the days of Duns Scotus, have delivered the individual soul from all that is authoritarian. It was Emerson's dialectical desire that "the universe be kept open in all directions," a maxim of pragmatic significance, although our Anglo-American Pragmatists have not the will to view their neat doctrine in the

strong light of irrationalism and immoralism, for which reason they cannot claim Emerson as a prophet of the cult. In his desire for an 'open universe,' Emerson indulged in sentiments quite blasphemous; this appears when he says, "Jesus would absorb the race, but Tom Paine or the coarsest blasphemer helps humanity by resisting this exuberance of power." At this point, it may be noted that Emerson had a theory of profanity which was to the effect that all appeal to the sacred, God, Heaven, and the like, is affirmative in its metaphysical import, while the converse appeal to Hell and the Devil signifies the negativistic and destructive. It was perhaps because of his implicit nihilism that Emerson found a place for Diabolism and blasphemy.

On the practical side of worship, the biography of Emerson informs us that early nineteenth-century Unitarianism was too narrow for the Transcendentalist's idea of belief and sacrament; like Parsival, Emerson was unable to comprehend the meaning of the Lord's Supper, but unlike Parsival no sense of pity ever came to enlighten him. Emerson's attendance upon church service seems to have shown him no more than that Transcendentalism was sorely lacking in the pulpit; for himself, he feared no Day of Judgment, but kept his blue eye open to that principle of Eternal Justice referred to in the essay of *Compensation*. His wife, who must have learned certain transcendental lessons in the home-circle, once said it seemed wicked to her to go to church; Emerson himself was willing to indulge in a kind of Pagan prayer, "the soliloquy of the beholding and jubilant soul," but most prayers seemed to him like theft. "As men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect." Furthermore, we may imagine, if the universe is only the home of the Over Soul, the affairs of the universe will be adequately taken care of; if the prayers of the Psalmist prevent the dawning of the morning, such outpourings, when viewed transcendently, can amount to no more than a kind of "chirping" before the appearance of the Immortal Light which,

however, needs no such solicitations. Such was the *gaya scienza* upon the basis of whose premises Emerson was able to come to his transcendental conclusions.

Re-adjustment.

Are we not correct, then, when we assume that our Emerson must be read anew in the fresh light of individualism? The need of Emersonian nihilism is painfully apparent in our culture to-day. If we could forget all that has been said on the subject of education, and could remember Emerson's immortal address, *The American Scholar*, delivered in the year 1837, our intellectual life would be far more sound and satisfactory than it is at the present hour. Hordes of aliens from Europe have aroused within us a peculiar sense of social responsibility, whence much of our philosophy of social service springs. But, the exigencies of the immigration problem are no greater than the demands for genuine American culture. Let 'night schools' teach the immigrant how to succeed in his new world, but let us not forget that we have a duty to our own youth for whom school and college provide none of the opportunities which are calculated to produce future Emersons. Shall we let the immigrant destroy our intellectualism? If we must hold up his hands, we must teach our Americans to hold up their heads. At a time when all free intellectualism has been thrown to the winds of sociality, it is well to reconsider the claims of inward ideals and remote interests, as these were presented by the most penetrating of American minds.

But, to pay tribute to the supremacy of the Emersonian ideal is not to accept all the particular conclusions which the Transcendentalist felt so free to draw. We would not for a moment suggest that the sincerity of our Nihilist was wanting, but in the midst of many of his clever displays of opinion, we have the suspicion that he may have stacked his cards and indulged in a false shuffle, since the position of every ace and deuce seems perfectly well known to his hand. In the midst of spiritual storms, as these were hardly

weathered by Ibsen and Strindberg, it looks as though our Emerson's barque had not gone to sea at all, but had ridden at anchor in Boston Harbor. Then, with all his merry references to the problems of the State, it seems as though his thought had never felt the full force of the nihilistic ideal as we are compelled to brunt it to-day. Knowing little or nothing of the realization of the immoralistic ideal, as this now confronts us, he was more ready than are we to play with the concepts 'good' and 'bad.' The same may be said of Emerson's cavalier-like attitude toward the problem of religion, discussed as it was by him at a time when irreligion as such was not the sombre fact that it is in contemporary life. Emerson seems thus to have conjured up ideas of anarchy, immoralism, and irreligion; in our case, these notions thrust themselves forward of their own force.

On the subject of irreligion, Emerson was as near insincerity as it was possible for such a mind to be. While Emerson broke with the Unitarian church as such, he seems never to have departed from the theistic moralism of that sect, so that his irreligious wanderings were always conducted within sight of well-known paths. In this manner, Emerson's Diabolism was by no means as heart-felt as was the case with Huysmans and Strindberg. Unlike the great Swedish pessimist, Emerson could not say, "How terrible to search for God and find the Devil! Well, that is what happened to me." Emerson searched after God and found the Over Soul. To be more definite, Emerson was profoundly and permanently affected by the Spiritualism of Swedenborg; so was Blake; so in a measure was Kant; so was Balzac. But, with Emerson, as with the late Professor James, Swedenborgianism acted as a sort of fourth dimension, whereby the Transcendentalist and the psychologist had a way of escape when pressed by those facts which are usually supposed to be limited to the three dimensions of space. Those who have no such secret stairway up to the heights of spiritual life are not so ready

to play with men's prayers or the varieties of their religious experiences.

Unlike other irreligionists, Blake, Wagner, Ibsen, Strindberg, Emerson kept his notions within such bounds that he never attempted any innovations with the question of sex; in this one fact, he escaped the criticism that has been brooding over the modern drama. A dilettante, Emerson was no decadent, so that he never felt the need of self-repudiation or repentance. His essay on *Love* has nothing erotic about it; indeed, the very suggestion of the sensual made him "shrink and moan," while memory was embittered with "infinite compunctions." This moralic quality in a nature more than usually pure made Emerson so oblivious of the Magdalen that he felt no need of an intercessory Madonna. With Baudelaire, it was necessary for the poet to repose in a kind of Catholicism; Wagner demanded both Buddha and Christ to save him; Strindberg felt constrained to make the journey to Damascus. With Emerson, then, shall we not say that he but played with immoralism and irreligion? Black as was his ink, he knew no Black Mass; not having been tempted, he cannot save those who are tempted.

The spirit of the times has changed since the days of Emerson's *Essays* and his *Harvard Addresses*. More than a generation ago, we learned from the Scandinavian and the Slav that life is largely a matter of striving and suffering; Ibsen and Strindberg, Dostoïevsky and Tolstoi have disclosed the bitter roots of humanity, so that we cannot repose in the pleasant pessimism of our great Transcendentalist. We have learned that to be one's self, man must will himself, while the path to personality is often accompanied by a peculiar acquaintance with grief. But, if our Emerson, with his gentle immoralism and irreligion, knew naught of these things, it does not follow that he was wanting in greatness, still less may we conclude that the nation does not need him to-day.

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